



NEPAL TRANSITION INITIATIVE

Lessons Learned and Best Practices: Mobilizing Youth

BACKGROUND — Nearly 61 percent of Nepal’s population is youth between the ages of 18 and 25. Access to education has increased the proportion of youth who hold at least a high school-level degree. However, Nepal’s economy has not been able to create employment opportunities at a rate to meet the demand of the tens of thousands of job seekers entering the workforce each year. In addition, Nepal’s political transition has created a highly politicized environment where youth are often mobilized by politically-motivated groups to organize rallies or enforce *bandhs* (transportation and market strikes) or even engage in criminal activities.

During the immediate post conflict period in Nepal, youth were easily mobilized to participate in disruptive actions that led to conflict and violence. These actions were driven by social challenges such as high unemployment rates, poverty, and a lack of education. Youth had very high expectations for themselves and for the country as a whole in the post-conflict period. However, there were many existing political and economic challenges facing youth that led to frustration. Youth were capable of being dynamic change agents and there was a need to engage youth positively in the peace process to ensure its sustainability.

NTI RESPONSE — Through its activities, the NTI program greatly focused increasing the positive engagement of youth in their communities and in the larger peace process. For the NTI program, youth were viewed as a key vehicle in which to engage communities on the peace process and in facilitating local development. The NTI program adopted two main approaches for mobilizing youth – providing opportunities for youth to participate in the development of their communities and creating awareness among youth about democratic norms and principles. In the post-conflict period, the NTI program took advantage of youths’ desire to build their communities and create leadership opportunities for themselves. The NTI program implemented several different grants that mobilized youth to create awareness about the local development planning process, to provide resources to youth to rehabilitate community infrastructure, and to work with local governments to provide basic services to communities. The NTI program also implemented awareness raising activities that taught youth about their responsibilities as a citizen in a democracy.

Achievements

- ◆ Mobilized more than 6,000 youth to rehabilitate local infrastructure in 515 VDCs of 11 *terai* and two hill districts.
- ◆ Trained and mobilized more than 43,000 youth as conflict mediators in their communities in nine conflict-affected districts
- ◆ Trained and mobilized more than 3,300 youth to increase awareness about complex constitutional issues such as federalism in six districts.
- ◆ Mobilized 6,000 youth to educate nearly 180,000 people about the local development planning process in 10 districts
- ◆ Trained and mobilized nearly 44,000 youth peace volunteers across 12 districts to spread awareness about the comprehensive peace agreement and the responsibilities of the Constituent Assembly.
- ◆ Mobilized more than 5,700 youth volunteers to assist nearly 55,000 people to access government services directly in 11 districts
- ◆ Trained and mobilized more than 8,800 youth throughout the *terai* on the principles of democracy which resulted in 155 local civic improvement activities.

LESSONS LEARNED/BEST PRACTICES —

- ◆ **Select Youth from the Targeted Communities** – NTI selected and mobilized youth from the communities in which the activities were implemented. This provided youth with opportunities to work closely for and with their own communities and while also show themselves as local leaders. This approach assisted in creating an environment of easy acceptance of information and increased community ownership and accountability towards NTI activities.
- ◆ **Combine Capacity Building of Youth with Tangible Opportunities** – The NTI program combined leadership and capacity building training with actual opportunities for the participating youth to better their communities. For example, youth would be trained on the principles of democracy and then the participants would implement civic improvement activities of their choice that would benefit their communities. Thus, training was combined with an opportunity for the youth to ‘live’ what they had learned. Another set of activities trained youth on the local development planning process where youth were then mobilized to create awareness about the process in their communities. However, the youth were also given resources that would allow them to rehabilitate a community building or repair a local road as part of this work. In many cases, this allowed participating youth to receive more than a certificate as their actions were allowing them to be seen as leaders in their community. Much feedback from the youth participants suggested that these opportunities greatly enhanced their position in their communities while also making them feel more responsible for the welfare of their communities.
- ◆ **Create Unity through Youth-centered Forums** – Where possible, the NTI program worked through existing youth groups (e.g., clubs, school groups, etc), but there were several instances where new structures were established in order to facilitate greater inclusion. For example, NTI assisted with the establishment of youth mobilization committees where youth facilitated dialogue with their communities and government officials about identifying local development priorities. NTI also worked through debate clubs, football clubs, and other forums. These forums provided youth with an opportunity to organize around common interests and work for the betterment of their communities. Youth were able to exchange ideas and share information with each other. In many cases, these forums were utilized by communities and local governments to assist with local development projects. Providing venues for dialogue was a strong secondary result of these informal structures and were used in ways not initially anticipated.
- ◆ **Communities Respond to Youth Mobilizing Efforts** – The NTI program found that when local youth are given opportunities that they prove to be very effective mobilizers in their communities. For example, when youth were mobilized to work with their communities on rehabilitating community infrastructure communities strongly contributed their own in-kind support. Feedback showed that communities trusted their local youth and wanted to support their efforts. NTI found that when youth were poorly selected (i.e., not from the local area, etc) then the communities’ interest was not as strong. Youth bring energy to these activities and they are trusted by their communities.
- ◆ **Youth Networking Assists Coordination and Effectiveness** – Many youth have few chances to travel beyond their districts or regions. NTI set up several activities that provided opportunities for youth from different districts to share their experiences with each other. For example, youth that had participated in a community infrastructure project in one district would travel several districts away to visit with a local youth group who had managed the same NTI activity in their community. The youth would discuss what they learned and then work together on a civic improvement activity. Feedback showed that youth were not only appreciative of the exchange of information, but they also utilized what they learned in their communities upon their return. Youth learned how other youth were coordinating with their local government officials or how a group liaised with a local community forest user group to get additional funds for development projects.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUTURE USAID PROGRAMMING:

- ◆ **Continue to Provide Opportunities for Youth at the Local Level** – Given the limited nature of implementing short-term grants under NTI, USAID would be advised to provide longer and more in-depth support to youth working in its target districts. Youth have proven interested in learning new skills and having opportunities to better their communities and there may be many ways future USAID programs (regardless of sector) could support this. Feedback from NTI partners and beneficiaries suggested USAID continue to find ways to help youth remain involved in the development of their communities. Several comments recommended identifying and building the capacity of youth leaders from outside of Kathmandu which would positively impact the voice of youth in national decision-making circles.
- ◆ **Support the Government's Efforts to Create More Opportunities for Youth** – USAID can play a role in continuing to support the government in ensuring that it is creating employment and leadership opportunities for the nation's youth.